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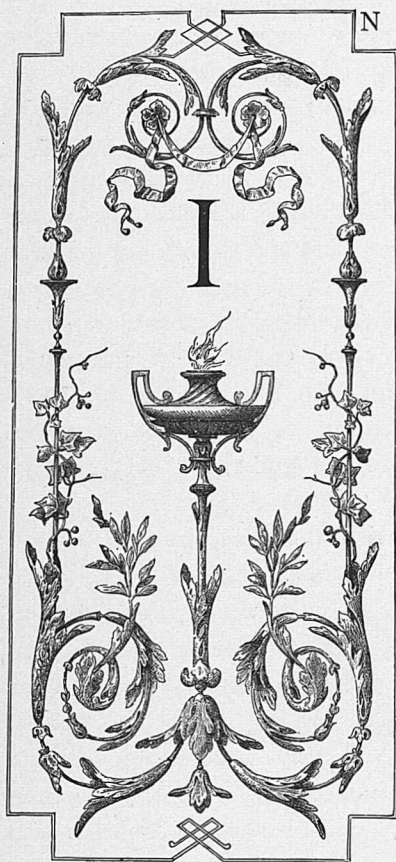
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MICHAEL MUNKÁCSY.

SECOND AND CONCLUDING ARTICLE.



IN the happy choice of subjects, on which so much of an artist's popularity depends, Munkácsy has been singularly fortunate. True, in those drawn from Magyar life he has had the advantage of tilling an almost virgin soil, which the hardships of his early years, like ploughshares, only assisted in making fertile. His native country, situated on the borders of Eastern and Western civilization, and partaking of the characteristics of both, yet with customs and costumes distinctively endemical, furnished him with motives at once picturesque and original, which personal experience inspired with subjective force; and what a succession of dramatic pictures they have made!

The first of them which had the advantage of a larger exhibition than the local art unions of Pesth or Munich was the *Siralomház*, better known as *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*. It was painted in Düsseldorf, and exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1870, where it received a medal, and established the artist's reputation at one stroke. It was followed by a work of the same dimensions, — fifty-two by seventy-two inches, — entitled *War Times, an Episode of '48*, painted for Mr. James Staats Forbes, of London, in 1871, but not exhibited until it appeared in the Vienna Exposition of 1873, together with the *Night Rovers*.

These three paintings, produced in quick succession, were all tragedies, — almost painfully intense, but neither morbid nor sensational. They exhibited a singular power of conviction and a subtilty of psychological insight which awed and captivated even those critics who, like Henri Delaborde, protested against their violation of the law of Ingres: — "L'art ne doit être que le beau et ne nous enseigner que le beau!" Yet the force in each was purely moral, and the supreme moment of every drama rather suggested than portrayed. Thus the one picture was more terrible than an execution; the other, by a peaceful congregation of women in a cottage, listening to the recital of a slightly wounded soldier, while occupied in a simple employment, epitomized all the dreary facts of war better than even a blood-stained field of battle would have done; and the third — the saddest of the three perhaps — showed a human soul wavering between the two powers of good and evil, its wings tangled in the bird-lime of cruel destiny.

What confirmed the impression made by all of them was the unstrained naturalness of the compositions. They were neither theatrical nor sentimental. There was no excess, no violence of action or exaggeration in the means employed to express it; and the types of the *dramatis*

personæ were singularly varied and characterized. Every figure was subordinate to the catastrophe, yet each contributed to heighten its effect.

In the *Síralomház*¹ the artist introduced the spectator into the cell of a condemned man on the eve of his expiation. The Hungarian custom permits the exhibition, in order to allow friends to take a final farewell of the criminal, and those indifferent to his fate to receive warning from it; and before the picture one becomes an involuntary participant in the scene, and identifies himself with the one class or the other. It has all the reality of a death-bed and the pathos of a requiem, and, shuddering, one asks the question Schiller puts into the mouth of Cassandra,—

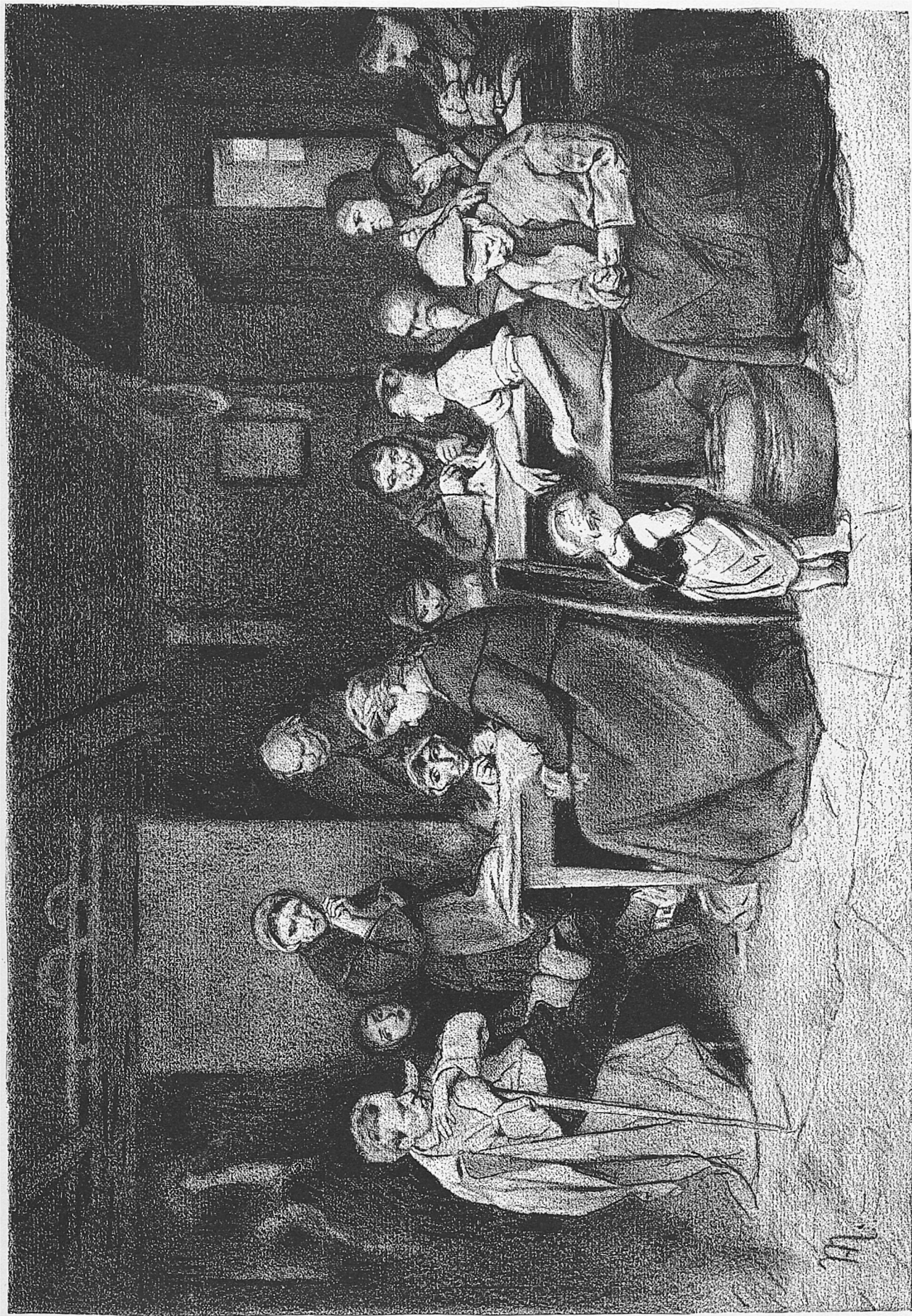
“Frommt's den Schleier aufzuheben
Wo das nahe Schreckniss droht?”

In the *War Times*, an illustration of which accompanies this article, as in the earlier painting, we have glimpses into the life of nearly every figure, the saddest story being that told in the pallid face of the hunchback youth, on whose lineaments envy of the wounded *Honved* struggles with admiration of him, and the consciousness of doing something for the fatherland with the despair at not being able to die in its defence. The same sympathy of the artist with the isolation of deformity is again exhibited in a picture painted in 1877,—a scene in an Hungarian tavern, where a little comedy between rivals is being played. A young girl—such a village coquette as the Magyar poets love to describe—sits smiling beside a handsome young blacksmith, who holds her hand, enjoying the suppressed fury of a sulking *Csikós*, whose foot beats time to his emotion at her inconstancy. A hussar drinking with a group of peasants, two of whom are joking with the waitress, surround the same table; but solitary in a window niche of the background sits, glaring at the others, a deformed guest. Nothing could be finer than the contrast of the frown on the features of the jealous lover,—not with the smile of his rival, but with the hopeless misery on the countenance of the crooked cripple, to whom the pleasures and the pains of love are alike remote, and who would give, one can guess, his very soul to feel, if but for once, even the thorn of passion's rose.

The scene of the *Night Rovers* is laid in a street of Pesth, with the dull gray of a chill morning breaking over the housetops. The marketwomen have only just arranged their stalls, and are waiting, with hands folded under their aprons, the arrival of customers. The laborers are on their way to the daily toil, and at the corner of the street one—a young girl carrying a basket—encounters an escort of gendarmes conveying to the central magistracy the inmates of the various station-houses, the villanous-visaged haul of the preceding night that the policemen have gathered. Foremost in the sinister procession is an unhappy youth chained to a hardened criminal. He himself is not one, scarcely an amateur indeed as yet, but one whom a hasty impulse or an evil destiny has betrayed. On the various jail-bird types behind him one can see sullenness, recklessness, hatred, depicted; his face shows only shame and remorse. His dress is that of a mechanic; he wears the smith's apron Munkácsy so loves to paint. Who is the young woman struck with a sudden horror as she recognizes him? A virtuous girl, not without comeliness. His sister or his betrothed?

These early successes have been succeeded, at intervals in the past seven years, by *The Recruits*, in the Museum of Pesth, the *Village Champion*, in Mr. Henry C. Gibson's gallery in Philadelphia, and other genre subjects drawn from Hungarian life and manners. Westphalia and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg have also contributed impressions which he has recounted on canvas, among which may be mentioned *The Examination in a Village School*, and *The Two Families*,—a charming idyl, representing a young peasant woman with a child by her side and

¹ This painting is in the possession of Mrs. Willstach, of Philadelphia, by whose lamented husband it was ordered in 1869, the commission marking the commencement of the artist's successful career. A photograph of it has been published by Goupil & Co., and it has been also reproduced in an etching by Flameng, which by some mischance has never been published. An etching of the principal figure, by Redlich, of which a phototypic reduction was given with the first of these articles, has lately been published by M. Sedelmeyer, of Paris.



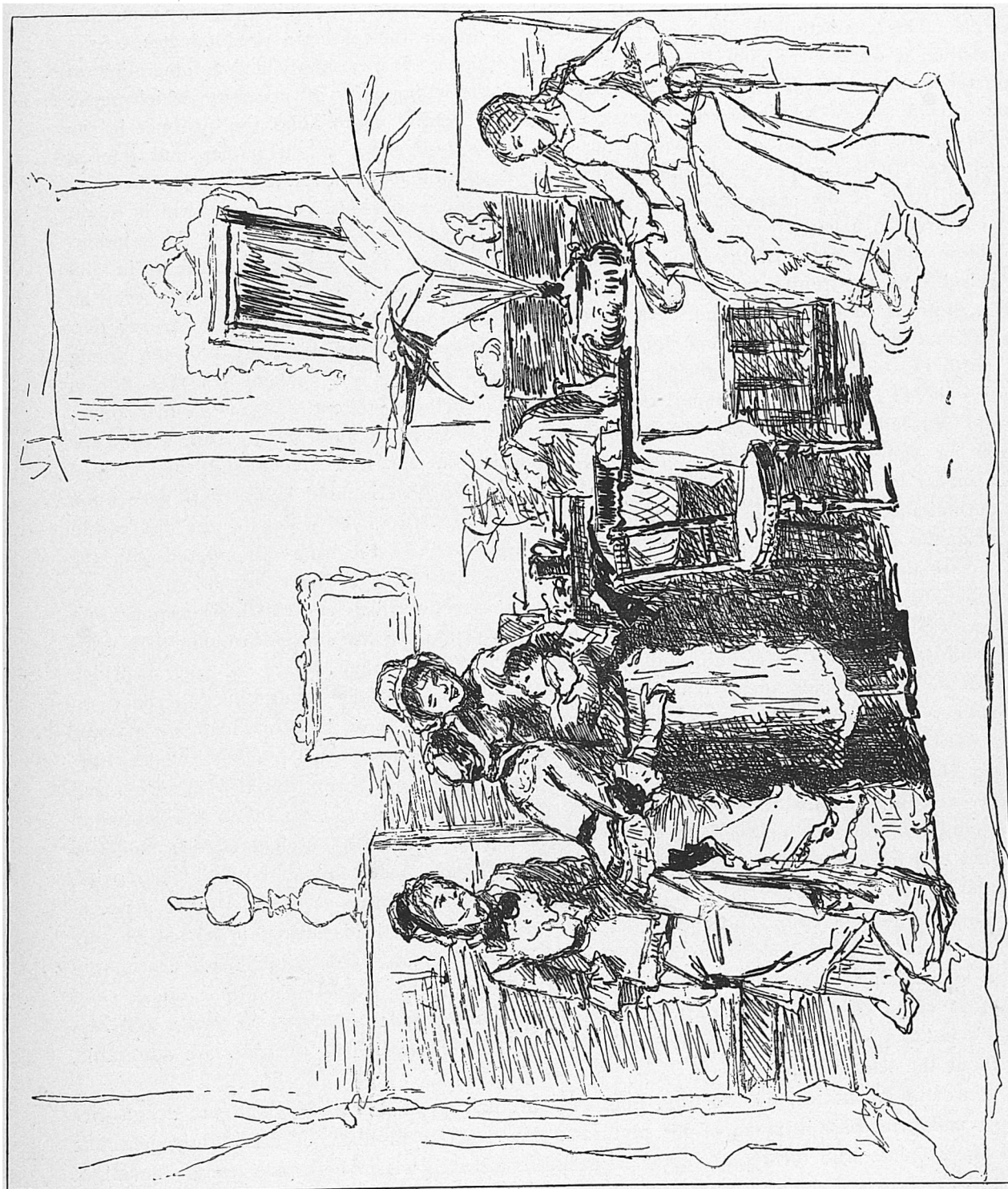
M. MUNACSY, INV.

T. JUGLARIS, DEL.

A WAR EPISODE.

FROM THE CARTOON IN CHARCOAL IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. JOHN R. TAIT, BALTIMORE.

(THE PAINTING IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. JAMES STAATS FORBES, WICKHAM HALL, KENT, ENGLAND.)



THE VISIT TO THE BABY.

PHOTOTYPIC FAC-SIMILE OF AN ORIGINAL PEN-AND-INK SKETCH BY M. MUNKÁCSY.

THE PAINTING IN THE COLLECTION OF MRS. A. T. STEWART, NEW YORK.

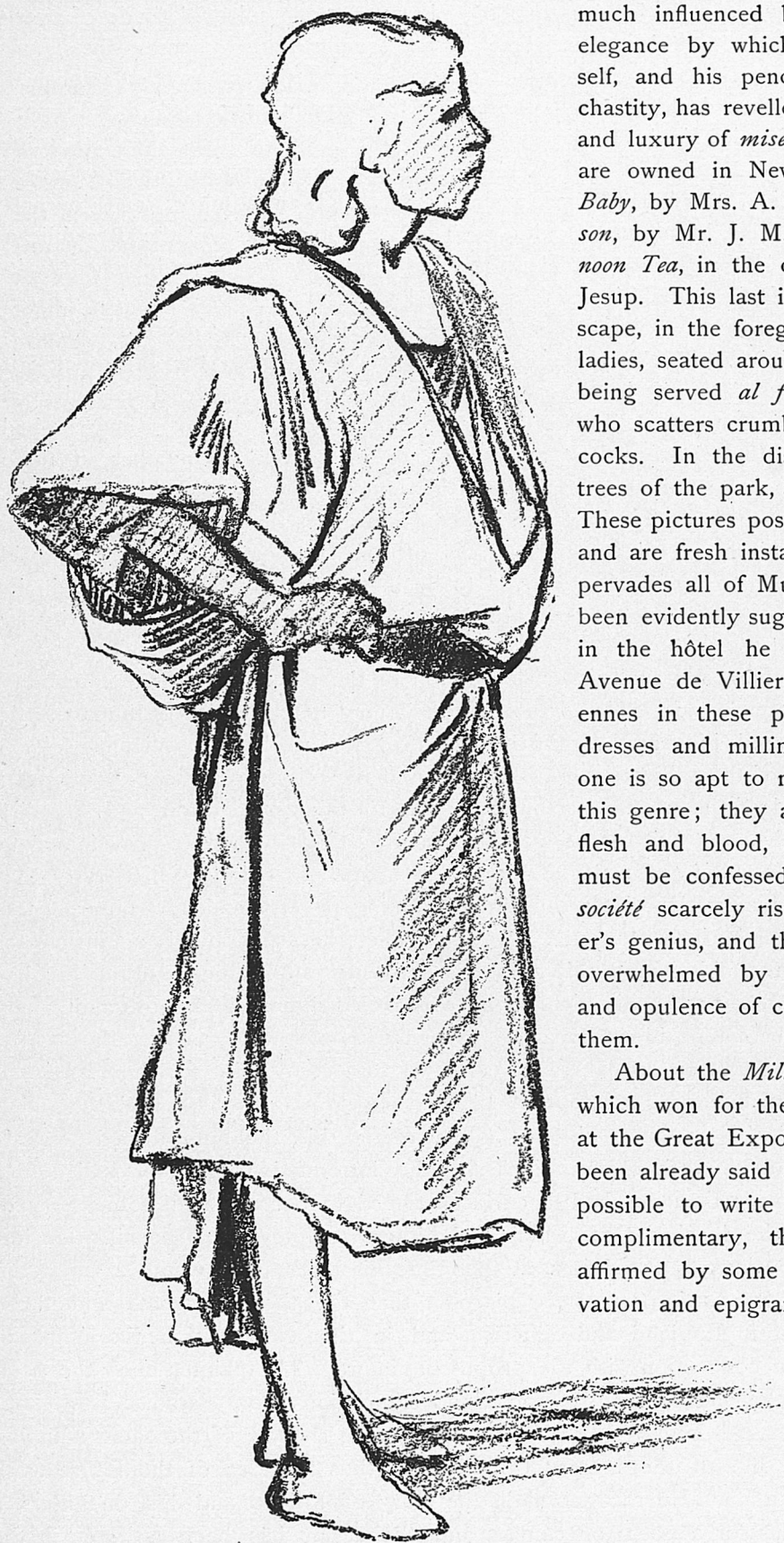
a crowing babe on her arm, watching a brood of puppies crowding around a bowl of milk, tenderly encouraged and protected by their mother. Somewhat resembling this picture is *Preparing for School*, beautifully reproduced by the needle of Unger.

The first of his Parisian genre pictures was the *Mont de Piété*, exhibited in 1874, another example of his characteristic penchant for subjects in which the pathetic predominates. As a composition it wanted the conciseness of his earlier designs. It was simply a conglomeration of character studies brought together by accident and the community of necessity, which make strange bedfellows. On the canvas there was no single central figure, like the prisoner in the *Condemned*, or the youth in *The Rovers*, around which sympathies might gather and interest concentrate. In this respect it resembled more an illustration for a novel than a scene from an epic; and some of the characters were almost conventional,—obvious personages which might have occurred to a less original genius,—such as, for instance, the group around the window, the widow and her orphans, the poor musician with his fiddle, the *ouvrière*, the lorette in silk and velvet suffering from a temporary *baisse*, and the boy model triumphantly bearing away an artist's sketches he has redeemed. All these are stock properties more or less, necessary perhaps on that account; but in two figures the artist asserts his individuality:—in the young man (with the blacksmith's apron once more) who—his arm in a sling, and his face full of sadness—holds a watch in his hand, the last relic of a beloved parent and of happier days; and the old lady with patrician air and features, who is seated against the pilaster, a fur cape around her shoulders and a pug of pure race squatting at her feet. Her hands are clasped over a *carton* filled with laces on her lap, and her eyes are bent in kind but earnest gaze upon the youthful mechanic. What is hinted of the story of these two lives, which in age and condition make the strongest contrasts in the picture, compensates for the want—compared with the artist's more dramatic works—of pathetical or humorous situations in the composition.

In 1876, the *Interior of a Studio* was exhibited at the Salon, which contained his own portrait and that of Madame Munkácsy. The painter represented himself attentively listening to a criticism of the lady, palette on thumb, and seated on the back of a chair before an easel, on which stands an unfinished landscape. In this picture he made his first successful effort to shake off the blackness and heaviness of his color. The atelier is one of those *de luxe* which are affected by the princes of modern art, and which they take pride in painting the portraits of, as Fortuny and Makart have done. What a contrast to the conventional garret studio of novels—and of reality also, for that matter—of twenty years ago! What a difference between the workshop of the painter's boyhood, or even the dingy atelier in the Ritterburg at Düsseldorf, and this one, filled with rare and beautiful objects, sculptured cabinets, faded splendor of old tapestries, sumptuous stuffs, old armor, and curious pottery,—with all the other *bric-à-brac* made a necessity to-day, both of the salon and the atelier *à la mode*! The artist is attired in a coat of gray velvet, while the lady's toilette is of the same material in blue, admirably painted and charmingly relieved against the rich, transparent background. Behind the easel, in a corner, sits a child model, that some of the Paris journals by a curious blunder described as *sa fille*; and Zip, Madame's pet pug, reclines in languid obesity on the softest rug. The portraits are admirable, and without the least flattery.

It is worthy of notice, by the way, how well Munkácsy paints dogs, which are accessories in many, and principals in some of his pictures. He owns a number, of aristocratic pedigree and priceless value, who form part of his household, and with whom he converses as one might with children. "Ah, Teleka!" he sighed, on finding the faithful animal in the street, where in his preoccupation he had left him while he paid a long visit to a lady, "ah, Teleka, thou art wiser than thy master!" To which the dog wagged a deprecating assent.

The critics applauded the new departure in color which the *Studio Interior* disclosed, and this encouragement led the painter to advance still further in the same direction, until he attained to the perfection of his *Milton*. In some others of his recent works he has been almost too



YOUTH STANDING.

PHOTOTYPIC FAC-SIMILE OF A STUDY BY M. MUNKÁCSY, FOR THE PAINTING "CHRIST BEFORE PILATE."

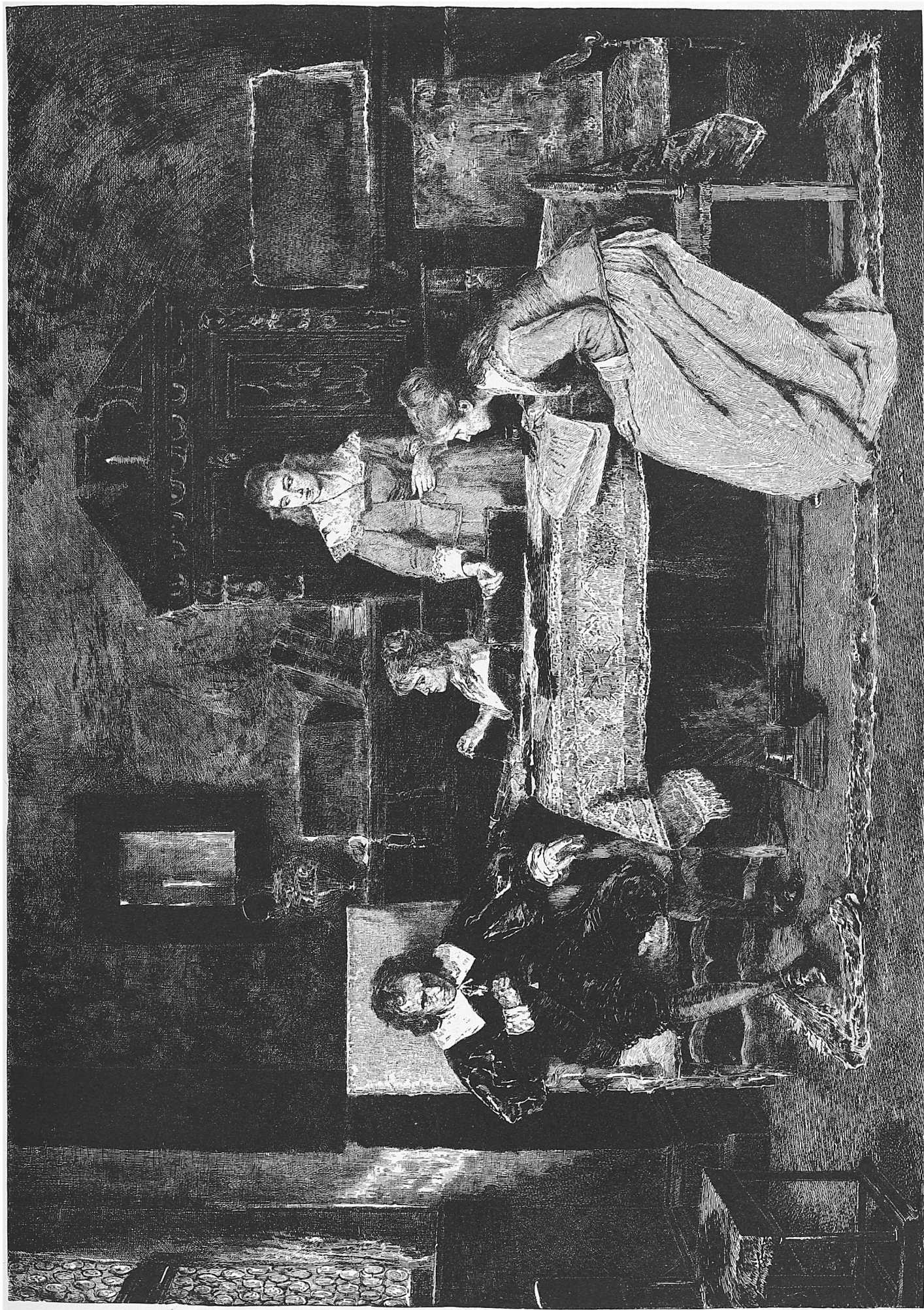
much influenced by the fascinations of the elegance by which he has surrounded himself, and his pencil, erewhile sombre in its chastity, has revelled in gorgeousness of color and luxury of *mise en scène*. Of these, several are owned in New York,—the *Visit to the Baby*, by Mrs. A. T. Stewart, the *Music Lesson*, by Mr. J. M. Fiske, Jr., and the *Afternoon Tea*, in the collection of Mr. Morris K. Jesup. This last is a vigorously painted landscape, in the foreground of which a group of ladies, seated around a table on which tea is being served *al fresco*, are watching a child who scatters crumbs to a pair of hungry peacocks. In the distance, half hidden by the trees of the park, arise the walls of a château. These pictures possess an episodal character, and are fresh instances of the personality that pervades all of Munkácsy's work. They have been evidently suggested by his new *entourage* in the hôtel he has recently built in the Avenue de Villiers. Nevertheless, the Parisiennes in these paintings are not all Worth dresses and millinery, like the figures which one is so apt to meet with in productions of this genre; they are charming women of real flesh and blood, amiable and *spirituelle*. It must be confessed, however, that *tableaux de société* scarcely rise to the level of the painter's genius, and their slight *motifs* are rather overwhelmed by the lavishness of *technique* and opulence of color in which he has framed them.

About the *Milton dictating Paradise Lost*,¹ which won for the artist the medal of honor at the Great Exposition of 1878, so much has been already said and sung as to make it impossible to write anything, either critical or complimentary, that has not already been affirmed by some one else with acute observation and epigrammatic sparkle. When the picture on its travels reached Pesth, the critic of the *Lloyd*

¹ The phototypic reproduction of Courty's etching of the *Milton* which accompanies this article was made from a superb proof in the possession of Messrs. H. Wunderlich & Co. As a matter of course, it does no sort of justice to the *etching*, but it serves very well to give an idea of the composition. — EDITOR.

plaintively complained that "not a single high-sounding phrase, not one splendid tirade of overflowing praise," had been left with which to welcome in an equally festive manner the Hungarian artist to the capital of Hungary. A pamphlet of one hundred pages has been published by M. Sedelmeyer, the Paris art dealer through whose hands the painting passed to the purchaser, nearly every line of which is in laudation of the work, "before which," Louis Viardot writes, "the great names of Rembrandt and Velasquez have been pronounced, and justly." Every detail of the execution, every brush mark almost, has had an admirer; and journals which differ in everything else have agreed with each other about this,— "the Republican *Temps*, the Orleanist *Français*, the Bonapartist *Pays*, the Legitimist *Union*, the enlightened *Indépendance Belge*, the clerical *Defense*, the frivolous *Figaro*, and the grave *Journal Officiel*." From the smallest provincial paper to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, there has been but one opinion. The last-mentioned authority, alluding to the recompense it obtained, said, "Of all the decisions, it is the only one, perhaps, which has received universal approbation." When it was announced in New York that Mr. Robert Lenox Kennedy had purchased this *chef-d'œuvre*, the *Evening Post* reproduced in its columns a number of these eulogiums, expressing at the same time the hope that this gift to the city would escape the invidious remarks with which the bestowal of the other pictures in the Lenox collection had been commented upon. Against a verdict so unanimous of the foremost critics in the world there could be no appeal. The *Evening Post* proved to be in this instance too sanguine in its expectations, but, at all events, deprived the censure it anticipated of any critical authority by more than hinting at the animus of it.

Without attempting, therefore, any analysis or description of the painting which the liberality of the late Mr. Lenox has made accessible to the reader, it may not be uninteresting to settle a point which has been mooted in regard to the inception of the work. The Vienna *Zeitung* declared, "The mere choice of the subject in itself embarrassed the critics in their speculations"; and the *Fremden Blatt* asked of the painter, "How came he to think of Milton and Paradise Lost?" It is easy to conceive how this occasioned surprise to those who were accustomed to observe the artist take his *dramatis personæ* from the lowest strata of society,—his poetry that of human wretchedness, his humor the winter sunshine illumining poverty and the bitter necessities of life. The explanation is, however, quite as easy. The true artist soul is a mirror that reflects the truths which surround it. That this axiom is eminently applicable to Munkácsy has been already shown. From first to last his pictures have recorded impressions profoundly personal, so that even his lighter compositions have rarely been without the tinge of pathos which identifies them with his own past. In 1876 he was seeking a subject to paint for the *Exposition Universelle*, which had just been announced to take place two years later. The applause which had greeted his *Studio Interior* was not without influence, and his thoughts turned towards some *motif* which might combine fresh opportunities for the introduction of color and loftier types of the human countenance than he had been accustomed to portray, with some story of more general interest than the local dramas which had hitherto employed his pencil. He imparted the subject of his musings to the writer, at that time his guest, with whom a variety of suggestions were discussed. It was important for his plan that the theme selected should be one likely to awaken interest in England and America, and in this conversation the name of Milton was first mentioned in connection with the proposed picture. The painter knew the poet. Years before, in Düsseldorf, he had frequently read aloud translations from Paradise Lost, both in German and Magyar. He had himself lived for months in the shadow of the same affliction as that which darkened the life of the immortal bard; and thus the idea of the future work was then and there decided upon. He recognized in the story of Milton and his daughters a dramatic and powerful nucleus for a poem on canvas, and the result has been an epic in the frame of a genre picture. In carrying out the intention he made no pretence of painting an historical work, and might not have been solicitous even to make the heads in it portraits, had



MILTON DICTATING PARADISE LOST.

PHOTOTYPIC REDUCTION OF AN ETCHING BY COUNTRY FROM THE PAINTING BY M. MUNKACSY. BY PERMISSION OF THE PUBLISHER, M. SEIDELMEYER, PARIS.
(THE ORIGINAL PAINTING IS IN THE LENOX GALLERY, NEW YORK.)

such a thing been possible. He diligently acquired all the information at hand concerning the history and archæology of the time when the poem was written, with reference to studies of details of costume and accessories, but did not attempt to gain false verisimilitude by the accumulation of petty facts, having no æsthetic value.

His object was to paint Milton, not the man as he appeared to "a Dorsetshire clergyman" or "the painter Richardson," but the rapt and inspired poet as he looks and lives in another poet's imagination. The accepted and pious tradition that his daughters filially loaned to their blind parent the use of their eyes and hands, was the mere thread on which he strung his jewels of *technique* and pearls of profound dramatic observation. What does it matter if a critic says of the legend, *Non é vero*, and the painting illustrates a fable, and not a fact? *É ben trovato*, and the picture at least is true, if the story be false,—true to all who know Milton as he is disclosed through his sublime work,—the rival, or rather the colleague, of Dante, with the aureole of the prophet on his brow, and the odors of Paradise in his hair.



MAN LEANING ON A BALUSTRADE.

PHOTOTYPIC FAC-SIMILE OF A STUDY BY M. MUNKÁCSY, FOR THE PAINTING "CHRIST BEFORE PILATE."

The theme, therefore, so far from being a strange, is a most natural one, and indeed no painter has been better fitted by native gifts and personal experience to paint the blind poet than "the man who is all eye," as a German writer calls him, yet at the same time is also one who has himself suffered a temporary loss of sight.

The *Shoemaker's Apprentice*, (in the possession of Mr. G. B. Blake, of Boston,) the young artist's first success, was as unreserved in its realism as some of Zola's descriptions. The yawning vagabond, drowsily stretching himself out of a dirty bed in a garret, might almost turn a delicate stomach. The picture reeked of the coverlet, and the yawn was contagious. A reviewer, while praising the *Siralomház*, censured it also as an offence against taste and the religion of the beautiful. It was too horrible, "veridique comme un procès verbal, effrayant comme un mauvais rêve." That the painter, in the full tide of success and accumulated honors, sees life in sunnier aspects and brighter colors than when, as has been the case in his career, having gone supperless to

bed, he arose without knowing how he was to break his fast or where to find a dinner, is quite natural. That his choice of subjects and the tones of his palette should be in keeping with the altered conditions of his life is not less so; but that he has risen to a higher æsthetic level—to a recognition of the claims of beauty—proves that the cultivation of his mind and the ardor of his ambition have kept pace with his material progress. This has been the one advance possible for him to make, since his *technique* has long since been magisterial, and his science exact; and his achievement of it came as a surprise even to those who had the highest estimate of his genius. "Between this picture" (the *Milton*), writes Emile Bergerat, "and the former works of the artist, is a chasm almost immeasurable. All at once, and without anything to presage such an event, the painter has become a poet!"

Munkácsy is not one to doze upon his laurels. Thus far, none of his triumphs has been due to hazard, but to faithful and resolute endeavor, and every success has only spurred him on to new and loftier achievements. Before the applause which the epoch-making *Milton* occasioned had subsided, he had already commenced a still more ambitious work, the subject of which, taken from sacred history, represents *Christ before the Judgment Seat of Pilate*. Concerning this picture, that possibly ere the present lines meet the eye of the reader will have been completed, a friend in Paris writes:—"It is my firm conviction—and it agrees with the verdict of all who have seen it—that it will be the greatest work of art which has been produced for two centuries. . . . I believe it will not only cause an immense sensation, but will create an entire revolution in historical painting." Whether these exalted anticipations will be realized remains to be seen. At all events, the artist wins a new title to respect, who endeavors—in this age of sensational and decorative art—to educate the taste and to elevate the thought of the public beyond the mere pride of the eye. Munkácsy's pencil has been ever pure. Love and pity have been the Muses of his art from the first, and they will not desert him when he attempts to portray the loftiest human embodiment the world has known of those divine attributes; while the realism of his treatment, so far from degrading the subject, will only bring it nearer to our sympathy and reverence.

JOHN R. TAIT.



CARICATURE OF M. MUNKÁCSY,

BY HIMSELF, AFTER SEEING REGNAULT'S "SALOMÉ."

ORIGINAL IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR.